



INTO THE WOODS

Overlapping perspectives on the history of ancient forests

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Padua (Italy)

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HISTORY AND FOREST VEGETATION DYNAMICS OF THE FAVORITA PARK IN THE PALERMO SUBURBS (NW SICILY)

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The Favorita Park is an important green area located in the Palermo suburbs characterized by forest nuclei of naturalistic and historical interest. The Favorita Park covers about 400 hectares, below the slopes of Monte Pellegrino and is one of the most intact Sicilian ecological area characterized by botanical and forestry peculiarities. In fact, this area and Pellegrino Mount form the Regional Nature Reserve “Monte Pellegrino” included in the European Natura 2000 Network as Special Areas of Conservation (ITA020014). The origin of the Park (“Real Tenuta della Favorita”) dates back to the Bourbon king Ferdinand IV who fled to Palermo when in 1798 the Napoleon’s troops invaded Naples. In 1800, a royal edict expropriated a large surface of land between the Piana dei Colli and Pantano di Mondello in order to create the hunting estate of the King also used for experimental agriculture activities. As reported in the map of 1856, the estate was mainly covered by agrarian spaces for the cultivation of such as citrus fruits, prickly pears, olives and annual crops and other plantations of sumac or ash trees that are no longer present in this area. The presence of a monumental olive tree represents a relic of the ancient agricultural landscape before the irrigated citrus crops of eighteenth-nineteenth century. Some wooded areas are scattered in the Park, the most important of which is the so-called Bosco di Niscemi (approximately 6 hectares). This forest is dominated by *Quercus Ilex*, *Phillyrea media*, *Pistacia lentiscus*; there also present other evergreens of the Mediterranean maquis such as *Viburnum tinus*, *Rhamnus alaternus*, *Clematis cirrhosa*, *Arbutus unedo*, *Prasium majus*, *Smilax aspera*, *Asparagus acutifolius*, *Ruscus aculeatus* etc. Particularly interesting are some individuals of *Phillyrea media* which presented bigger size (more than 10 m in height and stem diameters of 30-40 cm) compared to the typical dimension of the species. The exclusive royal domain has conserved a fragment of the 19th-century landscape of the Conca d’Oro – the agricultural lands around the city of Palermo – preserved against the pressure of rapidly building speculation and unsustainable urban development during the last fifty years. The absence of human disruptive actions such as wood cutting or fires has favored the undisturbed growing of some area of Mediterranean maquis-forest.